

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 SNM-02 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-11

INR-10 LAB-06 NSAE-00 RSC-01 SIL-01 SCI-06 PM-07 H-03

L-03 NSC-10 PA-04 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15 ACDA-19

IO-14 OPR-02 OMB-01 TRSE-00 AGR-20 SCEM-02 INT-08

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R 301140Z NOV 73

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8653

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

DIA

DEA HQS

CINCPAC

USSAG NAKHON PHANOM

13TH ADVON UDORN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 18676

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJECT: READINGS OF THE BANGKOK POLITICAL BAROMETER
THROUGH NOVEMBER 30

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REF: BANGKOK 18299

SUMMARY: LABOR UNREST AND SURFACE ECONOMIC DISLOCATIONS REMAINED THE CENTER OF ATTENTION AS THAILAND EXPRESSED ITS NEW FREEDOMS. IN HIS LATEST TELEVISION APPEARANCE, THE PRIME MINISTER SUGGESTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT MAY REACT STRONGLY TO THE UNREST. HE ALSO DISCUSSED THE ECONOMIC SITUATION WITH THE FINANCE MINISTER AND THE BANK OF THAILAND GOVERNOR. THE THANOM-APPOINTED NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY IS UNDER PRESSURE TO DISSOLVE ITSELF, BUT A CLOSED SESSION DEBATE DID NOT RESULT IN MASS RESIGNATION. NASCENT POLITICAL PARTY STIRRINGS SUGGEST THAT AT LEAST THREE PARTIES ARE SHAPING UP. THAI ASTROLOGERS, HOWEVER, HAVE FIXED THEIR EYES ON THE PORTENT, KOHUTEK COMET. END SUMMARY.

1. LABOR UNREST REMAINED PAGE ONE NEWS THROUGHOUT THE WEEK. BOTH WHITE COLLAR AND BLUE COLLAR WORKERS ARE INVOLVED. VIOLENCE WAS A NEW INGREDIENT ADDED TO THE BUS DRIVERS' STRIKE. THOUGH TECHNICALLY ILLEGAL, STRIKES HAVE BEEN ABUNDANT, GENERALLY SHORT, SUCCESSFUL, AND WITH BROAD SUPPORT (BANGKOK 18511). STRIKES HAVE ALSO INVOLVED STATE ENTERPRISES AND UTILITIES. GOVERNMENT CONCESSIONS TO STATE ENTERPRISE WORKERS AND THE PROMISE TO PAY RAISES EFFECTIVE JANUARY 1 TO THE CIVIL SERVICE AND MILITARY BUREAUCRACIES (BANGKOK 18436) WILL INCREASE EXPENDITURES, BUT ALSO MAY GIVE THE BUREAUCRACIES A STAKE IN THE SURVIVAL OF RESPONSIVE GOVERNMENT. IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS UNREST, THE SANYA GOVERNMENT, WHICH IS SYMPATHETIC TO SOME OF LABOR'S DEMANDS, RAISED THE LEGAL MINIMUM WAGE.

2. PRIME MINISTER SANYA THAMMASAK APPEARED ON TELEVISION NOVEMBER 28 WITH FINANCE MINISTER BOONMA WONGSAWAN AND BANK OF THAILAND GOVERNOR PHUT NIMANHAEMIN TO DISCUSS THE ECONOMIC SITUATION. BOONMA MADE A FAVORABLE IMPRESSION AS HE EXPLAINED THE RISE IN GASOLINE TAXES AND SAID THAT THE INCREASED REVENUE WOULD GO INTO ROADS TO PROMOTE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION. BOONMA ALSO PROPOSED THAT GOVERNMENT WORKERS PAY TAXES ON THEIR

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SALARIES. THE PRIME MINISTER COMMENTED DURING THE SHOW THAT THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT IS LIKE A DOCTOR GIVING MEDICINE TO THE PEOPLE--IF THAT TREATMENT FAILS, THEN A SURGEON IS NEEDED. THE PRESS TOOK THIS COMMENT TO MEAN THAT THE POLITE PRIME MINISTER WILL HAVE TO GET TOUGH IF THE COUNTRY DOES NOT SETTLE DOWN. PREVIOUSLY THIS GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN WILLING TO ALLOW THE PEOPLE TO LET OFF STEAM AS LONG AS NO ACTS OF VIOLENCE WERE INVOLVED.

3. APART FROM THE RATIONING MECHANISM INHERENT IN HIGHER PRICES AND THE CABINET'S PLEAS FOR PETROLEUM CONSERVATION, NO FORMAL RATIONING MEASURES HAVE BEEN INSTITUTED IN THAILAND (BANGKOK 18491). SOME STUDENTS, HOWEVER, HAVE TAKEN UP THE CABINET'S PLEAS. KHON KAEN PROVINCE STUDENTS REPORTEDLY INVESTIGATED LOCAL GAS STATIONS AND HAD THE POLICE ARREST THREE BLACKMARKETEERS. THE BANGKOK ACTIVIST FEDERATION OF INDEPENDENT STUDENTS OF THAILAND (FIST) APPEALED TO THE PUBLIC TO CONSERVE GAS, AND SENT A LETTER TO THE INDUSTRY MINISTER PROPOSING THAT THE GOVERNMENT TAKE CONCRETE STEPS, INCLUDING RATIONING, TO CONTROL THE PROBLEM (BANGKOK 18588). THE STORY THAT STUDENTS HAVE REPORTEDLY REQUESTED BAR OWNERS ALONG ONE NIGHT LIFE AREA TO SHUT OFF THEIR SIGNS AS A CONSERVATION MEASURE HAS BROUGHT THE REALITY OF THE OIL SHORTAGE TO BANGKOK RESIDENTS AND TOURISTS.

4. THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY IS UNDER PRESSURE TO RESIGN BECAUSE THE FORMER THANOM GOVERNMENT APPOINTED ITS MEMBERSHIP. CRITICS FEEL THAT THE NLA DOES NOT REPRESENT THE PEOPLE AND MAY HINDER THE PROMULGATION OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION. THE ATTACK ON THE NLA, HOWEVER, IS ALSO THE FIRST DIRECT ATTACK ON PRIVILEGES THAT ARMY OFFICERS HOLD, SINCE THEY CONSTITUTE THE BULK OF THE MEMBERSHIP. THE NLA, IN A CLOSED SESSION NOVEMBER 29, REFUSED TO DISSOLVE EN MASSE. THE PUBLIC SESSION OF THE NLA WAS SIGNIFICANT, HOWEVER, BECAUSE ALTHOUGH THERE WAS LITTLE BUSINESS ON THE AGENDA, THE SESSION LASTED FOR AN UNUSUALLY LONG TWO HOURS. THE HIGH NUMBER OF SPEECHES THAT DAY SUGGESTED THAT PROSPECTIVE PARLIAMENTARIANS

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HAD ALREADY STARTED ELECTIONEERING AND THAT MEMBERS WERE TRYING TO COUNTER THE CHARGE THAT THE NLA IS UNREPRESENTATIVE.

5. THE FLURRY OF CRITICAL PRESS ARTICLES ON RTG-USG RELATIONS, PEGGED TO THE ARRIVAL OF THE NEW AMBASSADOR, SEEMS TO HAVE SUBSIDED. MOST NEWSPAPERS CARRIED ALL OR PARTS OF AN EMBASSY BIOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF AMBASSADOR KINTNER. WE CAN EXPECT, HOWEVER, THAT AN UNDERCURRENT OF CRITICAL OPINION ON USG-RTG RELATIONS WILL SURFACE PERIODICALLY (BANGKOK 18493).

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6. ALTHOUGH POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS ARE STILL ILLEGAL, A NUMBER OF POLITICAL GROUPS ARE EMERGING. THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY WILL RUN, BUT THERE SEEMS TO BE SOME QUESTION OF LEADERSHIP. THAWIT KLINPRATHOOM, FORMER MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT (MP) FROM RATHBURI, IS USING HIS EXTENSIVE PERSONAL WEALTH TO BUILD A PARTY. THERE
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ARE ALSO A NUMBER OF INDICATIONS THAT FORMER
MPS FROM NORTHEAST THAILAND, WHICH IS TRADITIONALLY
KNOWN FOR ITS POLITICAL RADICALISM, MAY FORM A PARTY.
KLEO NORAPATI, FORMER MP FROM KHON KAEN PROVINCE, IS
ESPECIALLY ACTIVE.

7. THE ART OF ASTROLOGY IS GETTING A BOOST FROM THE
EXPECTED APPEARANCE OF THE KOHUTEK COMET. PREDIC-
TIONS CONNECTED WITH THE COMET RANGE FROM ITS EFFECT
ON THE RICE CROP TO THE SAFETY OF THE ROYAL FAMILY.
ASTROLOGERS SAY THAT THE LAST APPEARANCE OF A LARGE
COMET IN THAI SKIES WAS IN 1932, THE YEAR THE
ABSOLUTE MONARCHY WAS OVERTHROWN.

8. THE LABOR STRIKES AND THE COMET REINFORCE THE UNDER-
LYING BELIEF AMONG SOME THAI THAT THEY WOULD BE
BETTER OFF AND MORE COMFORTABLE WITH A STRONG LEADER
WHO WOULD MOVE QUICKLY AND FORCEFULLY TO RESTORE ORDER.
SOME IN THE THAI MILITARY CITE THE RASH OF SRIKES AS
EVIDENCE THAT THE CURRENT CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT CAN'T
HACK IT, BUT AS YET THERE ARE NO SERIOUS INDICATIONS THAT
ANYONE IN THE MILITARY PLANS DIRECT ACTION.
CONTINUATION OF THE PRESENT DISTURBANCES COULD RAPIDLY
ERODE THE BASE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S SUPPORT, HOWEVER.
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